

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Bush and Simon: Audiences With Carter

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EXCERPT

The departure of George Bush from the CIA sooner than anybody expected and the more startling possibility that Treasury Secretary William Simon may moonlight for the new administration stem from the nature of their encounters with President-elect Carter during the transition.

Bush's six-hour intelligence briefing of Carter at Plains on Nov. 19, called a "disaster" by one Carter insider, was followed a week later by Bush's announcement he would quit as director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). But a warm, hour-long session between Carter and Simon at the Treasury Nov. 22 may produce the seemingly impossible: the conservative Republican serving as a part-time consultant to the Democratic President.

Since holdover CIA directors were retained in the 1960 and 1968 transitions, there had been speculation that Bush would stay for six months—perhaps longer if he hit it off with Carter. That was ruled out in Plains Nov. 19.

"Jimmy just wasn't impressed with Bush," a key Carterite told us. At one point, when Bush volunteered that the President-elect would probably prefer his own man at CIA, an unsmiling Carter replied coolly that was indeed the case and a new director would be ready Jan. 21.

Simon has been described in such lurid Democratic tones as a reactionary bogeyman that transition at the Treasury was expected to be barely civil. "I don't know anybody in the Ford administration that Jimmy detests as much as he does Simon," one insider told us before their meeting.

There was no sign of that Nov. 22, however. Carter asked Simon whether he would be available for special assignments next year, and Simon indicated he would. If that exchange involves more than simple courtesy, it could mean Simon's help on oil price questions—making use of his excellent contacts in the Arab world.

A footnote: Carter talent scouts are clearly looking for a businessman, not an economist, to succeed Simon at the Treasury. Two intriguing new names under serious consideration: Alden S. Clausen of Bank of America and Irving S. Shapiro of Dupont Company.